



STAFF PHOTOS BY PAUL KONCNY

Brian Byrns, left, aims the video camera at children participating in the Urban Summer Fun program.



At the Lincoln School, Binghamton, Urban Summer Fun site children prepare an educational television show.

The children are, from left, Jim Harvey, Laura Morrissey and Jeremy Duke.

City camp features fun, not woods

Sunday morning evenings

By JUDY TOLL

A special "game" show was filmed at the Experimental Television Center in Binghamton this week. But not one refrigerator, Lazy Boy recliner or dehumidifier was given away. The prizes were wrapped up in big words like Learning Experience, Enrichment and Good Times.

The boys and girls interviewed each other politely and sang their favorite songs with a touch of savvy that comes from having been born into the TV generation.

But when the time came for all eyes to watch the videotape replay, some of the "stars" died a thousand giggling deaths of embarrassment as they watched themselves perform.

The trip to the Experimental Television Center was all part of a day's activities for these youngsters in the Urban Summer Fun "City Survival" group.

Urban Summer Fun is a city camp sponsored by seven local agencies and coordinated with many others. So who says camp has to be overnights, hikes and cleaning the latrines?

For about 1,000 children, Urban Summer Fun means a choice of five organized activities every

day, with additional special programs planned in advance. At each of the eight camp sites, a big calendar is posted and marked with times and days of special events so that the children can plan for special projects.

The keys to success here are the program's two educational directors, Carol Mikoda and Susan Johnston, who work with the counselors and see to it that things are running smoothly at each site and that daily plans are being followed.

"This is not just a drop-in program," explained Ms. Johnston, who works as junior high guidance counselor in Windsor during the school year. "The kids come in every day and know exactly what is going to go on."

"One of the objectives of the program is to provide educational, enriching experiences, not just recreation and arts and crafts, although we offer that, too," she continued.

Ms. Mikoda, who recently earned a master's degree at Syracuse University and would like to become more involved in youth work, explained that much of the work is done ahead of time, with the cooperation and planning of all of the agencies involved.

Ms. Mikoda is responsible for the four sites on the West Side and Ms. Johnston's territory covers the four South Side sites. Each day they go to one site, help with the planning, meet with the staff, talk to the campers and assist in special projects. On Fridays they have a "free" day to return to headquarters at John Hus Presbyterian Church on Glenwood Avenue and tackle their paperwork.

One special project the two women are particularly proud of is their City Survival program, which includes children ages 9 to 14. The group has gone to county and city offices, learning about jobs and how the gears of government work; they have toured a downtown department store and have found there is more to merchandising than just arranging things on a display table.

"We hope to make the city a much more real and viable part of the kids' lives," said Ms. Johnston.

Ms. Mikoda pointed out, for example, that the children are now far more familiar with the city bus system as the result of having taken these special trips during the summer.

Apparently, the tours have been successful, according to the two group leaders.

"With a little bit of attention and respect, the kids respond so positively," said Ms. Johnston. She said the children surprised several of the office workers with their intelligent and probing questions.

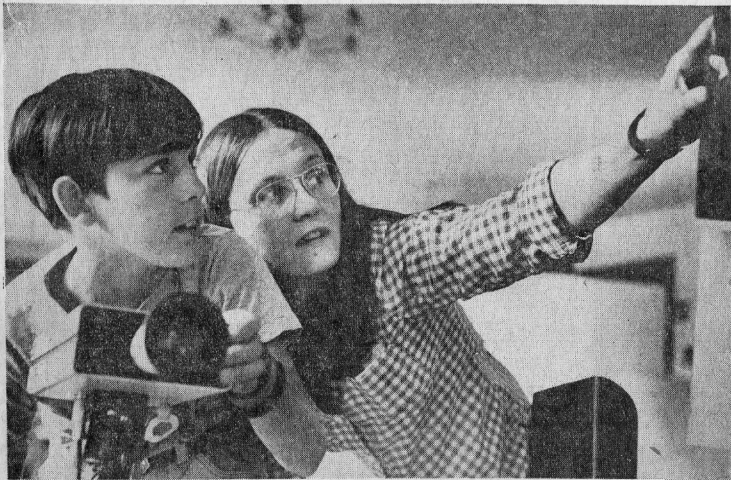
She explained that the children are involved in planning the activities and before each trip the youngsters set their own guidelines for behavior.

"They are very strict with themselves — much stricter than I would be," said Ms. Johnston. On one trip, she recalled, the group voted to save all their giggles, squirms and bubble-gum blowing for when they were in the elevator.

Meanwhile, back at the program sites in the city, projects are organized and carried out on a scheduled basis throughout the summer. As the two educational directors pointed out, it is important that the program not lose its focus.

Whether the children are involved in writing, producing and staging their own plays or working on their own newspaper, they have a goal in mind and in view.

"At the end of the summer we have things we can point to that we've done, instead of just playing six million games of softball," said Ms. Johnston.



Rich Harvey gets some direction from Sherry Miller, assistant director of the Experimental TV Center.



Carol Mikoda, left, and Susan Johnston, educational directors for Urban Summer Fun, prepare to show the children's videotape.